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SUBJECT: DEPUTY MOI ATTACKS WEAK GOVERNANCE IN FARAH

¶1. (U) Summary: The First Deputy Minister of Interior, Abdul Khalee Khaled, visited Farah in late March to look at kidnapping, corruption, and weak governance. Over several days, Khaled met with an array of provincial officials and community members, as well as the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and Police Mentoring Team (PMT). He emphasized the need to attack corruption in the province, identifying several individuals from the provincial government for removal. Khaled also advocated for a provincial Quick Reaction Force (QRF), a Joint Provincial Coordination Center staffed 24 hours a day by representatives from the army, police, National Directorate of Security (NDS), and ISAF, and an NDS-led intelligence fusion cell to enable better cooperation between NDS and the police. Khaled urged provincial officials to do a better job connecting with the populace, and as a next step, he promised to ask President Karzai to visit Farah with a team of Cabinet members. He expressed negative views of Iran. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Khaled visited Farah accompanied by his mentoring team and the national police chief, Lieutenant General Abed. Although MOI Deputy Minister for HQ LTG Basir visited briefly in February after trouble at the police headquarters, Khaled's visit was momentous for Farah's citizens because he is originally from Farah and because officials from Kabul rarely visit the province. He did his best to bring the central government's ear to as many people as possible in the province, meeting with the Governor, the Provincial Council, line directors (ministry representatives), the police, the NDS, educators, district elders, political leaders, the PRT and the U.S. Army PMT.

¶3. (SBU) Khaled's visit came at an important time for Farah, as the people have become more and more discouraged recently. Over the past eight months, Farah has had four different police chiefs, the most recent arriving in March. Also in March, two district police chiefs were killed, in Pusht Rod and Delaram. People have felt insecure since insurgents attacked four districts last fall, and in February, about 100 disgruntled merchants signed a petition against the Governor and Customs Chief, complaining about the "space between the government and the people" and threatening to close the shops in the Farah city bazaar. Corruption within the police is rampant, and kidnappings are at an all-time high, made worse by the fact that people suspect the police of involvement in the kidnappings. (Khaled told us Farah had 113 kidnappings on record over the past year, which he said is equal to all kidnappings in the rest of Afghanistan.)

CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE

¶4. (SBU) Khaled said the goal of the government should not be simply to kill its enemies, but to weaken them and then gather them close to the government. However, he recognized that winning people to the government's side is difficult in Farah, because district government is weak and unable to provide services. Most ministries do not have any representatives in the districts to provide services, and two districts have neither a district manager nor a chief of police.

¶5. (U) Despite the lack of effective government in Farah, Khaled expressed the belief that people have not lost hope in their government. Early in his visit, he met with approximately 100 elders from four districts who came to complain about the government's failure to arrest anyone for the murder of a former police chief. Khaled took a positive view of this, observing that when people complain to the government, at least they are recognizing there is a government and holding it responsible.

¶6. (U) The Deputy Minister made an effort to close the gap between the government and the people, holding several jirgas with district elders (including one focused on counter-narcotics and alternative crops), visiting schools, meeting with leaders of the local political parties, and recording an address for the local TV station. He urged people to defy the Taliban by educating future generations. Although he listened patiently to the people's complaints, he also asked them to take personal responsibility for fixing their government, urging them to look for solutions instead of complaining. He encouraged better communication among the tribes.

IMPROVING COOPERATION TO IMPROVE SECURITY

KABUL 00000855 002 OF 002

¶7. (SBU) Decrying the lack of coordination he observed among different elements of the Afghan national security forces, Khaled advocated for a Joint Provincial Coordination Center staffed 24 hours a day by representatives from the army, police, NDS, and ISAF, and an NDS-led intelligence fusion cell to improve cooperation between NDS and the police. (Although Farah currently has a Provincial Coordination Center at police headquarters, it has been ineffective, in part because it is not staffed consistently and senior officials do not participate.) Khaled also called for the establishment of a provincial QRF that could be called on in the event of an attack on a district center or similar emergency. (MOI Deputy Minister for Security LTG Mangal successfully argued for the authorization of QRFs in key provinces under the CY1387 (2008-2009) Tashkil or staffing plan.) Calling for immediate implementation of the three bodies, Khaled noted that President Karzai had signed a decree mandating their establishment about six months ago.

ATTACKING CORRUPTION

¶8. (SBU) Khaled followed through on his promise to attack corruption, identifying several officials as targets for removal, including the Afghan Border Police commander, the Customs Chief, and Noor Mohammed, a highway police commander who has achieved bogeyman status for his suspected involvement in kidnappings and for shaking travelers down on the road. (Strictly speaking, the Tashkil no longer authorizes highway police, who were disbanded following persistent corruption concerns; their continued existence remains an unresolved policy issue.) Although commerce had increased in the province, Khaled said Customs had sent the Finance department approximately half of what it owed over the year, and accounts fell over 200M Afghanis short. Khaled told the PRT and PMT that he does not believe Governor Baluch himself is corrupt, but that others in his administration are. He urged NDS and the police Criminal Investigations Division to keep track of officials' salaries in comparison to their spending and said he favored establishing a national program to reward people with either money or a "hero of Afghanistan" title if they provide information on corrupt officials.

DEVELOPMENT

¶9. (U) Khaled has only returned to Farah twice since leaving 32 years ago, and he commented on the remarkable change in the province brought on by 12 years of drought. Due to both the drought and general neglect by the central government, Farah suffers a lack of development in general, including roads, irrigation systems and electricity. He lamented the fact that desperate people in Farah feel forced to sell their daughters into bad marriages, and commented on the need for a women's safehouse, as well as women's work programs and sports programs to engage youth. Khaled urged the PRT to do more, comparing the funding from PRT Farah to PRTs in the East. (The PRT contributed \$6.5M to Farah using Commanders Emergency Relief Program funds last year. However, PRT Farah is the only U.S.-led PRT in Regional Command West.)

REGARDING IRAN

¶10. (SBU) Khaled expressed a profound distrust for Iran, which borders Farah province, at one point comparing President Ahmadinejad to Hitler. Khaled said that Iran is actively destabilizing Farah, in part because Iran believes Farah should be part of Iran, and partly because any development in Farah will reduce dependence on Iran. Consequently, Iran is opposed to the Bahkshabad Dam, which will bring hydro-electric power to Farah. (Khaled's position in the MOI derives in some part from international backing, and he is familiar with U.S. views on Iran; Afghans do not normally make comparisons involving Hitler.)

NEXT STEPS

¶11. (SBU) In his final meeting with the PRT, the Governor, and the Chairman of the Provincial Council, Khaled promised to urge President Karzai to visit Farah with members of his Cabinet to lessen the gap between the people and the government. He said he would encourage NDS and Karzai's office to send delegations to assist with investigations and help the Governor do his job more effectively.

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